

LUKE 11:1-13 "BEGINNING TO PRAY"

Speech Cues: vv.1b, 2a, 5a, 8a, 9, Jesus' Own World View! Will God Hear?

Request	1) vv.1-4 THE MODEL & PATTERN FOR PRAYER TO THE FATHER (Q).		WHO TO PRAY TO
1a	a.	<i>And it happened</i> that he (i.e. Jesus) was <i>praying</i> in a certain place,	<i>kai egeneto, pray</i> (3x), Dependence/No Magician
b	b.	and when he ceased, <u>one of his disciples said to him,</u>	3:21, 4:42, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 28, 10:21-22, 12:30-32, Wait
c		"Lord, teach us (now) to <i>pray</i> , as John (the Baptist) taught his disciples." (aor. imp.)	5:33, PRAYER: GENTILES
Teaching		//Q, Mt. 6:9-13, Did. 8:3, <i>Kaddish</i> (18 Benedictions), Father Rules A Family: Communal, Intimate/Direct, 38 Words	
2a	c.	And he said to them, "Whenever you <i>pray</i> , say:	1 + 5 COMPONENTS OF MODEL DISCIPLE PRAYER
b	1	Father ,	//10:21-22, 5x, 3x Address 1) DEPENDENCE ON <i>ABBA</i>
c	2	holy be your name. (p.v.aorist imp.) (Ezek. 36:16-32)	2 Thou 2a) DIVINE ACTION 1: Name
d	3//	Your kingdom come.// (p.v.aorist imp.) (12:32, 17:21, 14:15, Zech. 14:9)	2b) DIVINE ACTION 2: Rule
3a	1	Give <i>us</i> each day our daily bread ; (imp.) (9:23, Prov.30:8-9)	3 Us 2c) DIVINE ACTION 3: Basics
4a	2a	and forgive <i>us</i> <i>our</i> sins, (imp.) (6:37-38 Dt. 15:2)	2d) DIVINE ACTION 4 (2 Levels)
b	b	for <i>we</i> forgive everyone who is indebted to <i>us</i> ;	2 Images 1) God, 2) Others Sir. 28:2
c	3	and lead <i>us</i> not into temptation ." (imp.) (4:1-15, Firey Test, Vulnerable)	2e) DIVINE ACTION 5 8:13,22:40,46
Paranesis 1		No Doxology. 3 Needs: 1) Body: Me/You, 2) Relationships: Us, 3) Enemy Of All: Satan, //b. Ber. 60b	
		2) vv.5-8 PARABLE: FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT: HOW MUCH MORE! (L).	ASSURANCE 1
		Issue = Our Great God's Approachability/ Non-Reluctance, L Only	
Analogy:		a) vv.5-7 Question: What Will Not Happen: Stanza 1.	Honor/Shame: Village Hospitality
5a		And he said to them, <i>You Are One To Whom The Friend Has Come!</i> [Lesser To Greater Argument//vv.9-13]	
b	1	"Can you imagine having a friend and going to him at midnight	Ps. 121:4, 44:22-23, One Long Question?
c		*Friendship Topos (4x, Inflected [3 Cases]), Root Analogy, Sir. 6:7, 14-17, 1 Long Question	
6a	2	and saying to him, ' Friend , lend me three loaves (lit. <i>bread</i> s)	Request Made (Give) <i>bread</i> (3x)
b	3	for a friend of mine has arrive on a journey	Reason
7a	3'	and I have nothing to set before him,'	Appeal To Duty
b	2'	and he will answer from within, 'Don't bother me,	Duty Refused
c	Q 1'	the door is now closed and my children are in bed with me,	Reason Prov. 3:28-29
		I cannot get up and get you anything"?	Request Refused (Give) No Way!
		Seneca <i>Brev. Vit.</i> 14.4, God Is More Responsive Than The Honor-Bound Neighbor!	
		b) v.8 Answer: What Will Happen: Stanza 2 (Prov. 3:28, Ezek. 36:22-23).	Friend(4x)
8a	1	I tell you , though he will not <u>give</u> him anything,	Request Refused (Give)
b	2	after having arisen,	Arising
	3	because of being his friend ,	Not For Friend
	3'	but because of his avoidance of shame (Gk. <i>anadeia</i> , not <i>persistence</i>)	But For Honor
	2'	he will get up	Get Up
	1'	and <u>give</u> him whatever he wants.	Request Granted (Give, 5x)
Paranesis 2		Direct Link To vv.5-8, Addresses The Issue Of Good Gifts, God Has A Name To Protect	
		1') vv.9-13 POEM: ON THE FATHER'S GIFTS: HOW MUCH MORE GOD! (Q).	Mt. 7:7-11(SM)
9a	a1	And (So) I tell you , ASK and it shall be GIVEN to you; Ask	2 nd Person: You p.v., [2, 3-Line Stanzas]
b		seek, and you will find;	Seek Ask/Seek/Knock Continually, p.v. = by God
c	(2x3)	knock, and it will be opened to you.	Knock p.v., 11:29, 13:22-34, Responsive
10a	2	For everyone who asks receives,	Ask 3 rd Person: All ASSURANCE 2
b		and he who seeks finds,	Seek Opened Eyes/Scripture/Minds In 24:31, 35, 45
c		and to him who knocks it will be opened.	Knock p.v., Seek The Kingdom As Needy
Illustration			Mt. 7:9-10, Gives Nothing Harmful
11a	b1	And will any one of you, if the son asks the father for bread ,	v.3a, [3, 2-Line Stanzas, 3 ?]
b		will he give him a stone?	(Of course not!, Teeth) 4:1-15, 3 Look-Alikes
c	(3x2) 2	Or a fish, instead of a fish,	(Of course not! Hand bitten) 3 Basic Foods
d		will he give him an eel (snake)?	(Of course not!, Mouth) Snake/Scorpion (10:19) = Images Of Demonic
12a	3	Or if he asks an egg,	No Cruel Trickster
b		will he give him a scorpion?	Evil Compared With God
Comparison			
13a	a'1	If therefore you being evil ,	Giver 2 nd Person: You [2, 3-Line Stanzas]
b		you know good gifts	Gift //12:31-32, Lesser To Greater Argument, <i>qal wehomer</i>
c	(2x3)	to give to your children;	Receiver Know Your Need/ Your Father!
d	2	how much more the Father	Giver 3 rd Person: All ask (4x), James 1:5-8, 17
e		out of heaven the Holy Spirit	Gift 10:21-24, 24:49, Acts 1:4, Kingdom = Trinitarian Reality!
f		shall GIVE to those ASKING him.	Receiver 1:34-35, Acts 1:5, 8, 2:1-4, Gives Best!
		Prayer/Parable/Poem About God's Nature, Come Confident Of A Response, We Are Included In Father And Spirit // Jesus!	

BEGINNING TO PRAY

“Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.”

LUKE 11:1

The disciples begin to ask for the right stuff!

Early one morning in India a boy watched a holy man on the banks of the River Ganges. When the guru completed his prayers, the boy came near and asked, “Will you teach me to pray?”

The holy man studied the boy’s face without a word. Swift as a cobra, he seized both the boy’s ears and plunged his head beneath the river. He neared suffocation, but the grip upon him was iron. Finally the holy man released his hold; the boy gasped and said, “What did you do that for?”

“I answered your request; that was your first lesson.”

“What do you mean?” asked the bewildered boy.

“Well,” said the teacher, “when you long to pray as much as you longed to breathe, then will I be able to teach you to pray.”¹

Prayer does not begin with techniques but with the desire to pray, and that desire is itself a work the Holy Spirit. It’s odd, but many remain curious about the God they no longer believe in. This too is the Spirit. Life has a way of exposing our plans for self-sufficiency. So prayer, at least at the start, is a kind of death, an admission I am not a little god but a needy creature.

The prayer Jesus gave helps us see the world as it is. It’s a map of reality, of a world where many either deny God or pray to many gods but not to *the Father*, a world where God’s name is cursed as unholy and where another kingdom has effective local rule. It’s a world of many wills colliding rather than

¹ Edited, J.S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 422.

God's single will doing good for all. It's a world where some have too much daily bread leading to heart disease and others too little leading to malnutrition, a world where sin and unforgiveness— and the bitterness that goes with them— are epidemic, a world where every temptation and evil abound.² Our world, for all its deep beauty and abiding goodness from its Creator, is still unfair, unjust, cruel, compromised, dangerous and deadly. Life is now a mixed bag.

And this brief prayer— the one Jesus gave— is prayed in the midst of the world as it is. It's a battlefield prayer— brief, punchy, desperate. I am not the center; the Triune God is, and me and my world are a mess. To pray this prayer is to agree with Jesus' diagnosis, his map of the world condensed into what is the most prayed prayer ever. It's a mental act of agreement, an active act of protest, and a passionate call for the kind of change that only comes from God.

To pray this prayer is not to remain passive but to offer yourself as an agent of the One to whom you pray. I love and speak to my Father and honor his name; I act on the divine will, costly at it is; I relish my food and live simply that others may simply live; I do not keep a record of wrongs but trust my pain to God; I take up the battle for my own soul and say No to all that would compromise me. I spend time on my knees in order to survive and continue another day's operations. I am dependent; I am frail; I am faulty; I am a follower of a Jesus who will one day rule everything as King. He is the right side of history; he is the one on whom all the arcs of history converges.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Example And Pattern (vv.1-4)

Jesus was a man of prayer, a Jewish mystic whose prayer renewed his life with the Spirit's energies. His fragile humanity, like our own except that he had no inner rebellion against God and thus no history of sin, needed filling from the drain of the crowds, and of his friends! His remarkable public activity sprang

² An insight from Martin Luther, "An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer for Simple Laymen," *Luther Works*, Vol. 42, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 27.

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out of his private communion as Son with the One he addressed as *Abba*/Father. A place was found, prayers said, the mind stilled, the heart directed to God.³ And what he received, he gave away to the next needy person. He was saturated in holy love and divine joy. And here he went, stuff happened.⁴

Luke, who more than the other gospels highlights the prayer practices of Jesus, makes it clear that it was out of this communion that wisdom and strength came for the day's work and major decisions such as the choice of the twelve.⁵ Jesus prayed after his baptism as the Spirit came upon him to give power for the work ahead.⁶ It was a great filling of a deep, internal reservoir. There were forty days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness before his ministry began, his only recorded words being the Scriptures he spoke as weapons against the Evil One.⁷ There were also regular strategic withdrawals for prayer as in Luke 5:16, "But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed."⁸

³ On early Jewish prayer, see Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987), Chapter 3, "The Spirit-Filled Experience of Jesus," 39-56.

⁴ On Jesus mighty acts and their meanings, see Trevor J. Burke, Keith Warrington, *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit* (London, England: SPCK, 2014), esp. Chapter 8, "The Synoptic Gospels," 84-103; Graham Twelftree, "The History of Miracles in the History of Jesus," Chapter 10 in Scot McKnight and Grant Osborne, editors, *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 191-208; Graham Twelftree, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge, England: CUP, 2011), Chapter 6 by Barry Blackburn, "The Miracles of Jesus," 113-130; Graham Twelftree, editor, *The Nature Miracles of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); Sharon Beekman and Peter Bolt, *Silencing Satan: Handbook of Biblical Demonology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), Michael S. Heiser, *Demons: What The Bible Really Says About The Powers Of Darkness* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; 2020). For a contemporary retrieval, see Jack Deere, *Why I Am Still Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Seedbed, 2020).

⁵ 6:12-13.

⁶ 3:21-22.

⁷ 4:1-13.

⁸ 9:18, "Now it happened as he was praying alone...."

He prayed in joy when the seventy-two disciples return from their mission of healing,⁹ prayed with sorrow in Gethsemane and in agony from the cross, “Father, forgive them...,” and “into your hands I commit by spirit.”¹⁰ And in offering his disciples a prayer, Jesus was drawing them more deeply into his world and its central relationship.

A priest once noticed a woman who seemed rapt in prayer throughout the Mass. Eager to learn, he asked what form her prayer took,

“I say the *Our Father*,” was her simple response.

“But surely you must do more than that.”

“No,” she said. “You see, when I’m in good form for prayer all I say is the first two words: *Our Father*. When in middling form I’m able to get halfway through, but if there’s something on my mind and I’m in really bad form, I maybe say it two or three times.”¹¹

Of course the disciples knew prayers; they were children of the synagogue and the psalms, but here was something different. They saw what he did: the healings, teachings, exorcisms, his uncanny knowledge of the human heart, his poise under fire, the love that bubbled out of him for everyone, and the fact that what was true of him all the time was not true of them any of the time, at least not yet. He had a life-giving connection, and they wanted *in on it*. Being near him made them thirsty and curious. You can’t see that much power and love and not ask, “How’s this happening?” It’s clear he was not a sorcerer or magician using formulas and secret knowledge to manipulate unseen powers. He charged no fees. None of their other religious leaders lived like this, at least not in a long time. “Our rabbi Jesus has a level of cooperation greater than Moses, greater than the miracle working prophets Elijah and Elisha.”

They knew where to find him; it’s where he was every early morning.

⁹ 10:21-22.

¹⁰ 22:39ff., 24:34, 46.

¹¹ Edited, James Feehan, *Story Power* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1994), 100-101.

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They waited for him to finish, then a request by one for all, “Lord, teach *us* to pray, as John taught his disciples.” John the Baptist’s followers had a handy-dandy prayer that expressed his ministry, they wanted one from Rabbi Jesus, “They pray this way; how should we pray since we are your students?”

And the prayer Jesus gave is a community prayer.¹² Not an *I* and *me* prayer but *we* and *us*, “*Our* Father... *our* daily bread... *our* trespasses.. deliver *us* from evil.” It can be prayed in private, but never in solitude. Now Jesus responded to his friends’ request in a straightforward manner, “When you pray, say these words....” He gave a model that summed up what they were all about in this new experiment of traveling about watching the Father’s will and the Spirit’s energies work through the Son. There were already his followers, but here they ask to enter the reality of his intimate communion with the Father who directed him and the Spirit who empowered him. They saw the Triune God at work long before anyone had a theological formula for it. In him the lights were always on; now they wanted to see the power plant, not just its public effects. They asked and he gave; they sought and found; they knocked and he opened, so there is congruence between how Jesus behaved and what he taught.

It’s a simple prayer and clearly structured like a memorable melody, one to be played with variations without needing to look at the music. The prayer as Luke records it has only thirty-eight words in Greek. It’s shorter than Matthew’s fuller form from which we derive our church version of the prayer with the added doxology at the end. It’s been called many things: the perfect prayer, a school of prayer, the model prayer, the disciples’ prayer, the *Our Father*, a summary of the whole gospel, the love song of the whole world, and a battle shout for the end of time.¹³ In Jesus’ mother tongue of Aramaic it has rhyme, meter, and a careful structure.¹⁴ It’s a crafted prayer with only the

¹² For a tradition history of the prayer, see Kenneth Stevenson, *The Lord’s Prayer: A Text In Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2004); and for a pastoral exposition by the same author, see *Abba Father: Understanding and Using the Lord’s Prayer* (Harrisonburg, PA: Morehouse, 2000).

¹³ A catalog of titles from across church history, found in Nicholas Ayo, *The Lord’s Prayer* (Notre Dame, IN: University Of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 5-7.

¹⁴ J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1977), 94-95.

essentials present and much space for silence between the phrases. It's a prayer and an outline of topics to be expanded in conversation with God. It pulses with energy; each phrase builds on the others to a sobering climax where we plead for divine protection. It's a dangerous neighborhood we live in.

The only prayer Jesus ever gave us begins with an invitation to say something the disciples never said before, at least not to God; it would seem irreverent had it not come from Jesus and been his own pattern¹⁵ It may be why Matthew added, "Our Father, *who art in heaven*," to avoid it being too *chummy*. To them God was *The Holy One of Israel, The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob*. But Jesus used *Abba*, Aramaic for *Pappa*, unadorned, full of affection and respect. To pray is to place myself as a child before One who loves me. But to say that God is *Father* is not to say God is male.¹⁶ All the highest qualities of father and mother are included in Jesus' address.

But for many to call God *Father* is difficult; their earthly fathers were

¹⁵ Scholarly treatments include Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer In The New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1995), 37-69; John Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer* (San Francisco, AA: HarperCollins, 1992), 40-52. N.T. Wright, "The Lord's Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer," in Richard Longnecker, editor, *Into God's Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 132-154; Robert Karris, *Prayer And The New Testament*, chapter 1, "Prayer and the Historical Jesus," (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 1-39. For political implications, see the ever-provocative John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2010). For an complete review, see C. Clifton Black, *The Lord's Prayer* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2018). For a theological treatment, William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996); for a devotional treatment, Steve Harper, *Praying Through the Lord's Prayer* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1992); for a spiritual formation approach, James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling In Love With The God Jesus Knows* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009), Chapter 3, "God Is Trustworthy," 54-73.

¹⁶ Against the naming of God using the metaphor *Mother* because of a loss of transcendence and a tendency towards pantheism with the world viewed as an extension of God's body, see Elizabeth Achtemeier, "God the Father or God the Mother," *Mission and Ministry*, Vol. 8, Fall 1990, 18-30; also "Why God Is Not Mother," *Christianity Today*, No. 9, Aug. 16, 1993, 16-23. The Bible deploys female similes for God using *like* or *as*, but not metaphors which compare a whole to a whole for theological reasons.

violent or absent or drunk or unpredictable, and it takes healing before the reality of the Father’s love is stronger than the memories.¹⁷ For every good quality our earthly father or mother had, God is more, but God is also unlike them in all the qualities that were not so good. So the first step is the address, a child to a loving Father who’s eager to hear what he already knows. We speak; God listens; God speaks, we listen, and the simple address *Father* is where the long conversation that is prayer begins. Just say it, “Father,” and if you can go no further as it excavates your heart, so be it. It’s OK.

The first two petitions are set in parallel as imperatives in the Greek word order, “Your name, may it be counted holy; your kingdom reign and rule, may it come.” These are bold requests that God do what no human being can, which is to make himself known to reclaim the earth from sin and evil and death. It’s a bold prayer for a holy God to immediately bring the new age promised by the prophets and previewed in Jesus.

This prayer is not a request for a bit of progress to make life a bit better on our watch; it is—shockingly— a prayer for the immediate end of the world, for it to be swallowed in one great gulp by God. And if you can’t pray for God to end it now, it demonstrates how much you have invested here below, as Jesus noted, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”¹⁸

Now the one who so prays admits she stands behind enemy lines where God’s name is not sacred and where lots of *someone else’s*, both human and demonic, have a say in how things are now run. It’s a Frenchman, a member of the underground, hiding behind hedgerows near the coast on the night of June 5, 1944 and tapping out Morse code on a wireless, “Allies come. We are waiting. Eisenhower, come and deliver us; we are in captivity.” The next day Europe was saved, perhaps the whole world.

Two years ago Lori and I walked on those beaches and looked out through

¹⁷ On this pastoral issue, see James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God* (Downer’s Grove, Ill: IVP, 2009), 58-60.

¹⁸ Matthew 6:21.

gun slits in Nazi bunkers. How terrifying it was for a young soldier, perhaps a sixteen year old impressed from Estonia, to look upon the Armada and feel the concussions of naval gunfire creeping down the beach towards his position. I visited churches with the still blood-stained pews and wondered how dark it might remain had not the invasion succeeded. My great uncle, Lt. Col. Harvey Lewis, was on Eisenhower's *Overlord* staff, and I wanted to see the great events in which he'd played a small part. They saved the world didn't they, at least from the then current reign of thugs and murderers that was fascism?

But one day a greater invasion is coming, not across the waters of the Channel but down from above, not on isolated beaches in northwest France named Omaha and Sword and Juno, but over all the earth in a single moment to end history and sort out all the characters into two categories as the new reality arrives, the kingdom of the Triune God suddenly reclaiming all creation. It's not for something small but the largest thing that we pray, "Stick up for your holy name, Dear Father, by bringing your kingdom down upon us now." King Jesus is the world's only right ruler; what does not submit to him has no future.

Christian prayer is not just presenting a wish list.¹⁹ Petition for our needs, even our desires, is important, just not first. First is to be close enough to feel the Father's heartbeat and see this world's corrupted state. It's intimacy with God, "Abba," and a great cry for freedom, "Thy kingdom come." The 19th century English preacher Charles H. Spurgeon wrote of our forebears:

"I have no small liking to those rare old-fashioned Methodist prayers as made the walls ring. Oh! for a revival of those glorious, violent prayers which flow like hot-shot against the battlements of heaven.... For more of the prayer of God... the body and spirit working together... the whole person being aroused to the highest intensity to wrestle with God."²⁰

¹⁹ On petitionary prayer and the Lord's Prayer, see Richard Foster, *Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992), Chapter 16, "Petitionary Prayer," 179-190.

²⁰ Albert Wells, ed., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 161.

So the first part of the disciples’ prayer is for a full arrival of what they’ve already seen unfolding in Jesus. Not the appetizers of the kingdom but the full meal.²¹ Not just healing for this or that person but the immediate healing of the world and the removal of all God’s enemies, demonic and human. The full restoration of the entire creation is the goal of the prayer Jesus gave.

Now because it didn’t happen yet, there are some things we need to survive as Jesus’ followers as we witness to God’s kingdom in its *now* and *not yet* dimensions. Because we are physical, we need to be sustained with bread and other good things; because we are sinners, we need to receive and give forgiveness to become peacemakers; and because we are vulnerable to deception and pressure, we need to be defended and protected in a tough neighborhood.

We need bread and all the basics that go with it because we are creatures and not angels. We ask for a day’s rations, not a stockpile. Not lavish or gourmet, but bread, not too much to make us obese or too little to leave us famished, but enough bread for the day’s good work. And since bread comes from wheat, and grain from the sowing and harvesting of the farmer, there’s an ecological and agricultural angle waiting here to be explored.

What does it mean to pray for daily bread in a county obsessed with weight and dieting? What does it mean to pray for daily bread when much of the world is hungry? What about poor neighborhoods where few have transportation and grocery stores are far away? They’re called *food deserts*.

What about those who eat most meals alone? How often do we break bread with those of different color, culture or class? The prayer for our most basic need is full of ethical implications. And when bread is joined with the words of Jesus, it becomes the bread of life in holy communion.

²¹ On the kingdom previewed now and fulfilled later, see Joshua S. Hopping, *The Here And Not Yet* (Pretoria, SA: Vineyard Publishing International, 2017); N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), Chapter 9, “The Kingdom: Present and Future,” 105-118; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: OUP, 2011), Chapter 4, “Enacting the Kingdom of God,” 35-56; Chapter 5, “Teaching the Kingdom of God,” 57-83.

The second petition is an exercise in corporate humility, "And forgive *us our sins*, as *we* forgive everyone indebted to *us*." What kind of community is this? An honest one, a community of sinners following Jesus and in perpetual need of receiving and passing on forgiveness and the freedom it restores.²² And this petition is not just for individual sins, but also the ones we commit in groups for which no single person seems responsible, "Forgive *us our sins*," and our part in them. It's what makes issues like racism²³ and poverty so hard to deal with. It's an infection of the whole, not just of a single part that can be isolated and addressed. It is only a forgiven and free people who have the moral courage and the ethical vocabulary to face the sins we commit together.

A little boy was saying his prayers as grandmother listened. He said, "If I should die before I wake," then paused.

"Go on," she urged, "finish your prayer." But the boy scrambled to his feet, hurried downstairs, then in a few moments was back in place again, taking up his prayers where he left off.

His granny asked where he'd gone in such a hurry. "I was thinking what I was saying," he insisted. "That's why I had to stop. You see, I'd mixed up my brother's zoo, and stood all his wooden soldiers on their heads, just to see how angry he'd get in the morning. But, if I should die before I wake, why, I wouldn't want him to find them that way, so I had to go down and fix them up."

With a quivering voice she said, "I imagine there are a good many prayers that would not be hurt by stopping in the middle to undo a wrong."²⁴

Jesus had the annoying habit of linking our ability to receive forgiveness with our willingness to pass it on. Those who hold grudges and nurse inner resentments are stalled, frozen in the cold fires of resentment and choked by the gall of bitterness. The willingness to receive mercy from God and pass it on is

²² For a challenging read on grace, vulnerability and sin, see John Lynch, et. al., *The Cure: What if God isn't who you think He is and neither are you* (San Clemente, CA: CrossSection, 2011).

²³ For a good introductory article, see Timothy Keller, "The Sin of Racism," (quarterly. gospelinlife.com/the-sin-of-racism).

²⁴ L. Flynn, *Come Alive With Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 188.

basic; without it there's no real community, not in a marriage, not between parent and child, not between the generations and races, not in a church. What Roto-rooter is to sewage lines, forgiveness is to us all. It removes ugly clogs.

What a torrent of love it would release if each of us would, under the Spirit's guidance, make that phone call, tear up a mental IOU, forgive the debt, write the letter, or go to a graveside. I did this several years ago at a cemetery just outside Saluda. I needed to formally forgive my father's father Carl for the deep damage he did to our family and how it affected me two generations down the line. As a four year old he lost a mom and two siblings to a late 1890s flu epidemic in four days, was likely bi-polar, later on became an alcoholic, then violent. He was damaged and damaged others; that is how sin works, doesn't it? Not just individual bad acts, but deep family and cultural patterns that engulf us all. So we pray, "I forgive, O Lord, and now break the curse with me." It's why my father never mentioned his own.

I choose to forgive because Christ has forgiven me. I pass on the gift and ask release from the pain so I can remember without torment. It sets me free from being bound by the other and held hostage by them.²⁵ I no longer rent them space in head and heart. I'm no longer a victim, Christ giving away *through me* what he has already given *to me*. Nothing will shrivel your soul and make you easy prey to a whole host of disorders like unforgiveness. It's demon food, so get it off your table and out of your diet. And the deeper the wound, that harder it is, and the more we need it, and the more help he offers.

In the Lord's Prayer we ask for three things: *Father, feed us*: our bodies; *Father, forgive us*: our relationships vertical and horizontal; and *Father, defend us*: our ongoing battle with temptation and testing with sin and evil. The problem is not just around us or between us but *in us*.

"And lead us not into temptation" is where the prayer abruptly ends in

²⁵ On forgiveness and its social implications, see Gary Thomas, "The Forgiveness Factor," *Christianity Today*, January 10, 2000, 38-45 with bibliography. Our best researcher on these issues is the psychologist Everett Worthington. See his *Handbook of Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006) for a collection of research articles.

Luke 1:1-13..... 13

Luke. It may also be translated, “And save us from the fiery trial!” Now God is not the source of this but our sustainer through it. It’s our experience of what Jesus faced in his forty days of desert trials. It’s a fervent prayer that this community not be overwhelmed or give in to the pressures that assault us within and without, “O God, protect us from selling out our friendship with Jesus,” which they all did one Friday. Yet he sustained and rebuilt them, the only exception being Judas who opted out too early.

This is not a prayer for lonely heroes or casual religious bystanders but for a huddle of disciples who know they will be shredded without the Father’s protection. This prayer is not surface or safe. It deals with ultimate issues of this world, with God and of good and evil. It’s not self-therapy. It’s not a good luck charm. It’s not about more stuff beyond the basics. It’s about thriving in the mission we share with Jesus and crying for God’s intervention. This marks us as his disciples. This is *what* we are to pray, and the rest of the text tells *why*.

God Is Eager And Generous To Give (vv.5-8).

Nazareth was a village in the hill country of Galilee where hospitality was a matter of pride. They would never say to a guest, “You have honored *me*,” but “You have honored *Nazareth*.” And every family bakes its own bread, often enough for a week, and everyone knows who’s baking that day; you can smell it in the air. Loaves are large, as much as two feet across, and are used in place of utensils. With each mouthful you break off a fresh piece as a scoop for the dishes on the table. A guest must not get a fragment but at least one whole loaf. Less is not fitting, like giving someone a knife but no fork or spoon. With each guest the honor of the whole village is at stake.²⁶

“Can you imagine?” said Jesus, “going to a friend at midnight and getting turned down?” They shake their heads.

²⁶ This interpretation depends on the work of Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 119-141, also Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), “The Friend at Midnight,” 437-448.

“Can you imagine meeting trivial excuses like the children are sleeping or the door barred?” They sneer.

“Can you even perceive such a thing happening?”

“No. Never. Not in our village. Too much honor at stake. We will do anything to avoid the shame.”

“Then you know as well as I do,” said Jesus, “that even if the one who knocks is not a friend, you’d help rather than be shamed in the streets the next day.” All agree.

But Jesus is not speaking about the reputation of the village but his Father. If you go confidently to a friend at midnight, as they did, *how much more can you go to the Father* knowing he will respond? The argument is from the lesser to the greater. When we pray for what Jesus says to pray for: the honor of God’s name, the arrival of God’s kingdom, that God feed, forgive, and defend us as we live into the mission, then we can pray with reckless confidence. It not a story about nagging but about divine welcome and provision.

God’s Best Gift Is Not Stuff (vv.9-13)

So far we have a *personal example*: Jesus, a *prayer*: the Lord’s Prayer, a *parable*: the friend at midnight, and finally a *poem* in verses 9 through 13. This cohesive little catechism on prayer was not just ripped off but carefully crafted to be memorable. In a culture where only 10-15% were literate, able to both read and write, the teaching of Jesus was shaped to stick in the brain and to be rolled over and pondered in the mind.

When someone *asks*, it’s because there’s a question. And when someone *seeks*, it’s because something’s lost or desired. And when someone *knocks*, it’s because they want someone on the other side to lift the latch. “Keep at it,” says Jesus using present imperatives, “Don’t quit too soon.” Ask hard questions, keep looking, and expect to be let in. God loves to become the focus of our desires. Spiritual hunger after the God of Jesus will always be satisfied. Chase God, and God will find you!

As a pastor I often hear stories of abusive parents. Brutal stuff, some of it criminal. Children who asked for kindness and got cruelty, for safety and

were sexually violated, for love and received alcoholic rage, for the basics and saw family finances thrown away in gambling. Nothing so rips a hole in the soul as cruelty from those who are supposed to be parents. If that's your experience, it may be hard at first to call God *Father*. The lesson for you is that God is *not like* your parents and that God will be for you what they never were.

Your heavenly Father is not a cruel trickster. If you need bread, you'll not crack your teeth on a look-alike stone while God and the angels laugh at your expense. And since there was a fish-type in the sea of Galilee that walked on land, God will not play bait-and-switch there either. No ugly surprises. God does not play practical jokes on needy children. It's possible in the shadows to see a curled up scorpion and mistake it for an egg. Reach for food and get a stinger! "Not with my God," says Jesus. God's gifts do not hurt but heal. And part of the healing Christ offers is for people to be re-parented and re-taught by their heavenly Father in a new family of brothers and sisters known as *church*. Jesus wants to breed in us the same confidence he has in the Father who gives in answer to our requests. So if there is some essential nutrient you didn't receive growing up, good news! You can find it here among God's people.

But God's best gift is beyond stuff. Jesus speaks a Trinitarian reality, "how much more the Father/ out of heaven/ the Holy Spirit shall give/ to those asking him." The Pentecostals and Charismatics are right in their excitement. Something wonderful happens in the church when people ask God to so fill them with the Spirit so that when the world presses down on them, Jesus runs out. The Son asks us to pray to the Father and ask for the filling of the Spirit. In prayer we are drawn into the life and work of the Trinitarian God. We become partners in the remaking of this world in anticipation of the next.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is a truth-teller, a Father-revealer and a Spirit-bestower. There is a Father who hears. There is a kingdom now and later. Our most basic needs are near to God's heart. Life is not an exercise in self-sufficiency but creative dependency. We need to be taught to interact with the Triune God, and Jesus gives us the script to deepen the relationship every day. What a gift.

An Examination of Conscience

“I cannot pray **Our**, if my faith has no room for others and their needs.
I cannot pray **Father**, if I do not demonstrate this relationship to God in my daily living.

I cannot pray **Who art in heaven**, if all my interests are in earthly things.

I cannot pray **Hollowed be Thy Name**, if I am not striving, with God's help, to be holy.

I cannot pray **Thy Kingdom come**, if I am unwilling to accept God's rule.

I cannot pray **Thy Will be done**, if I am unwilling or resentful of having it in my life.

I cannot pray **on earth as it is in Heaven**, unless I am truly ready to give myself to God's service here.

I cannot pray **Give us this day our daily bread**, without expending honest effort for it, or if I withhold from my neighbor the bread I receive.

I cannot pray **Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**, if I continue to harbor a grudge against anyone.

I cannot pray **Lead us not into temptation**, if I deliberately choose to remain in a situation where I am likely to be tempted.

I cannot pray **Deliver us from evil**, if I am not prepared to fight evil with my life and prayer.

I cannot pray **Thine is the Kingdom**, if I am unwilling to obey the King.

I cannot pray **Thine is the Power and the Glory**, if I'm seeking power for my glory first.

I cannot pray **forever**, if I am too anxious about each day's affairs.

I cannot pray **Amen**, unless I say, 'Cost what it may, this is my prayer.'”
